

Seattle Light Rail Review Panel

Meeting Notes for June 21, 2000

Agenda Items

- Briefing on Revised SStart Program Budget proposal
- Schematic Design Briefing on the Capitol Hill Station
- LRRP Business

Commissioners Present

Jon Layzer, Chair
Matthew Kitchen
Carolyn Law
Jay Lazerwitz
Jack Mackie
Paul Tomita

Staff Present

Debora Ashland, Sound Transit
Marty Curry, Planning Commission
Barbara Goldstein, Arts Commission
Lisa Merz, CityDesign
Cheryl Sizov, CityDesign

Jon Layzer chaired the meeting. The agenda was revised in order to allow the briefing on the SStart program to go first. Since the list of LRRP business was extensive, that was delegated to the end of the meeting.

Briefing on Sound Transit Public Art Program

Carol Valenta, SStart

Two new artists have been brought on board, Bill Will and Laura Haddad. Their primary projects will be the SeaTac and Northgate/Roosevelt stations and they will be working together on these.

The next update covers the equity and allocation concerns that have surfaced over the art funds and the dollar amount which was preliminarily designated for each station. There was a critical article in the Seattle Times regarding the art budget and how funds were divided up. Since that time, Carol has been asked to come up with a new allocation process which is focusing on segments of the Link system rather than individual stations. Since the design is only at 30%, it seems appropriate that the money not be allocated so specifically. This recommendation will be made to the Sound Transit Board. The next step is to try to be realistic about the budget and try to combine elements as much as possible.

Discussion

- It is unfortunate that this new approach is being taken because once the system-level artwork is accounted for, the south end will be taking the majority of the funds. I don't feel there is justification for this dollar for dollar approach to each station and segment. I'm also concerned about the aesthetic interior of the tunnel and the experience of moving through the tunnel. Currently, there is no art proposal for the tunnel. I'm worried that those stations will be shortchanged.
- The news article is an oversimplification of the issue, as is this new proposed budget allocation. Equitable and fair distribution of art funding is more complex than this.
- Another concern is the complaint that the at-grade rail system is designed for the "poorer" section of town and the idea that this area would be allocated less art funds than the more affluent, tunnel part of the system. The issue is much more complex than that, and this characterization does a disservice to that. It is unfortunate that this idea is floating around out in the community.

- In the Seattle Times article, it is unfortunate that the Sound Transit Executive Director characterized it as a station per station cost rather than allocation where art is needed. Earmarking funds for specific projects at specific stations is less important right now than identifying and prioritizing the opportunities. *(We had to take the next step and look realistically at what can be done with the funds we have.)*
- Will this new approach still ensure flexibility within the art program? *(Carol feels there is a lot of flexibility and that they will be able to work with it. There is incredible pressure to do something well and she feels there is an opportunity to give the Rainier Valley a strong identity through artwork and still do justice to the tunnels.)*

Discussion concluded and the Panel moved to the following recommendation.

Recommendation

The previous action from May 17, 2000 with respect to the art program still holds and the approach to prioritizing continues to be supported. The Light Rail Review Panel reinforces the importance of strong, aesthetic, architectural elements in the station designs, particularly in the event that less art funding may be available to the tunnel stations than previously thought. The Panel also expresses a desire to wait and have specific amounts of money earmarked at a later time noting that it is difficult to allocate money now when it is not known exactly where the money will be needed. The Panel will reiterate its concerns and priorities with a more detailed letter to Sound Transit.

Briefing on Capitol Hill Schematic Design

Allen Parker, Sound Transit

Mary Jo Porter, Sound Transit

Mark Spitzer, Arai Jackson

This is a new station design for Capitol Hill, one that the Panel has not yet seen. Per the request of the City, this station provides for 100% overbuild. Capital Hill community members also want the opportunity to build over the station. Because of this decision, there are design trade offs. If this is to be done, over one million dollars will be needed for the infrastructure of the station to accommodate future development. The current zoning (NC2-40 foot height) allows for two additional stories. It may be desirable or even necessary to rezone to NC3 with a 65 foot height restriction in order to make the property more attractive to potential developers. This is still being explored.

The basic station concept is still the same. There is a center platform with tracks on both sides. Mezzanines are located at both entrances to the tunnel which will be accessed by escalators, elevators, or stairs. Visibility of the escalator entrance will be enhanced as much as possible.

Sound Transit is holding a meeting on 6/23/00 for all the tunnel station designers to address basic concepts or commonalities among all tunnel stations. Common elements in the system wide entrances have been explored and the idea of a "lantern" design for the stationhouses has emerged, typically as a two story structure with unique glazing material. The lanterns would thus serve as an identifiable system wide element. Since these are not indoor/outdoor spaces per se, they don't need to be weathertight—that allows us to develop a lantern structure and play with different ways of joining glass panels. On Broadway, this may entail two lanterns, both of which include a corner aspect to increase identity and visibility of the entrance to pedestrians. A lantern and marquee could be combined to form a wrap around effect. The marquee idea is derived from imagery of a commercial street, and the marquee that used to be part of the old theatre in this area.

Both entrances have open space elements. There is also a proposed covered bicycle parking area and an overhead curved glass panel which goes above the stairs bringing users down to the platform, as well as curved glass "walls" at the street level. The curves are part of an attempt to differentiate the station entrance from whatever might later be built on top of them.

Several different scenarios were presented showing development possibilities above the station entrances, however, it is very difficult to speculate what the size, scale, and type of future development might be. With the current zoning restrictions, the addition of two stories may not be economically feasible for a developer. There are only about four sites in the two block radius that may benefit from the rezoning. The benefits of such a rezone are still being explored.

Discussion

- We have no way of knowing how real any of these scenarios are. These type of development deals are very difficult because there are so many complex issues. Who is going to control the envelope of the building, the financing, etc.?
- Design Guidelines should be developed to address any future development over the entrances and the relationship with the station elements. This may include the amount of the lantern which need to be left visible, what kind of materials are acceptable, or other specific development standards which must be met. If this is done, developers will have a much better understanding of what will be acceptable, and this will result in a better partnership between Sound Transit and the developer. *(If guidelines are too strict, this may reduce the square footage of buildable space which would result in the nonfeasability of the project).*
- The property at the south end is much larger and has much more maneuverability. *(Part of the challenge is the schedule. In order to meet the schedule, the entrances need to be tied down,)*
- Another challenge is the void space under the lantern. The destination appears murky and unclear—what do I do once I enter? This is where light and surface and color become important. *(Two goals—first find the entrance as a legible element in the landscape from the distance, and secondly, once inside the entrance, find the entrance to the escalator easily).*
- Is enough area being left on the corner of Broadway and John for people to linger? That corner has a lot of potential for a coffee cart or other activities, and already serves now as a gathering place of sorts. *(The concern is that the areas might eventually be built over and then wouldn't function well as open space. So, yes there are unanswered questions as to what will happen with the open space. But there are also opportunities for interim open space at the staging area.)*
- The south entrance feels more comfortable with its diagonal approach. It is important to have enough space to gather people. as the entrance of the cylinder feels more arbitrary. It's important to have outside space at the stations. The simple lines and shapes are very attractive. *(see these as directional and lighting devices as well).*

Generally, the Panel likes the connection between the underground and the surface.

Mary Jo Porter wanted to address some issues since there is going to be a neighborhood meeting on 6/22/00. She discussed the zoning and the fact that the business community would like the zoning to be upgraded to NC3, while the residential community is not so keen on this idea. Sound Transit will not be directly involved in this but she feels the issue needs to be addressed now, rather than later. If it is decided that the area should be rezoned to NC3, then things need to start happening now to ensure that development will all take place simultaneously with Link construction. She would like to avoid building the station and then having to reroute users later so that then a building could be built on top of it. To

date, no support for buildings that big (65' tall) on Broadway has come out of community meetings. Nonetheless, if the area is rezoned, new development would probably be more feasible to developers and this action may bring someone to the table now so that collaboration could begin.

David Goldberg spoke to his work in station area planning, presenting Broadway as a place where people visit but don't necessarily stay. The residential and commercial community want a place where people will live, shop, and take ownership of the streets. One of the things to come out of neighborhood planning is how we look at Broadway and how we can help move it to its next phase of evolution which would include a greater diversity of business, maybe some offices, and a lot more residential. Today there are mainly two story buildings with not much potential for future development. People are making money on these buildings and they don't necessarily want to tear down and start all over again without a financial need to do so. They're working with property and business owners to see how they want their community to look in five or six years. Station Area Planning is doing a feasibility study as to what redevelopment may happen and if it would really be beneficial to raise the height limit.

The business community also would like the North entrance to be developed with commercial or retail space. The residential community would probably like more open space but with the Cal Anderson park improvements, this should help provide a smoother transition from residential area east to the station entrance.

Discussion

- Is it a fair characterization that the business community would like more commercial/retail development while the residential community is divided evenly over this issue? *(Yes, the rezone recommendation is going to City Council later this fall. It should be voted on by January 1, 2001).*
- It seems that there is an abundance of development potential in this neighborhood. For whatever reason, it is not happening. Isn't it possible that a great station could, in effect, add more to the vitality of the neighborhood than new commercial or retail space? *(It is a robust time for development, so you might see residential above a one-story building.)*
- If there are large commercial or retail places, residential is needed to support that. Are projects that carry more residential being looked at? Is the idea to put housing on Broadway instead of moving it into the single family areas? *(We're looking for more modern spaces that might attract an anchor tenant which would result in more residential uses. We'd like to tie the two QFCs together at the south and north ends of Broadway by keeping the vitality down the length of the street—this south end by SCCC and the funeral home and gas station is the quietest part of Broadway and least active commercially.)*
- SCCC was talking about creating a retail frontage at one point, what happened to that? Also, how does the community feel about the height and scale of the Winters building across from the north entrance? (Hard to tell. Plus we have the challenge of how to transition from NC 2 or 3 to L2 within a short ½ block.)
- Yes, the redevelopment potential along the south part of the corridor is not that great given that Seattle Central Community College and the funeral home are permanent fixtures. Parking is a constraint in this area and if the height lid is raised, what will be gained? *(We don't know yet).*
- The lantern theme helps to create a system wide distinguishable element and it's interesting to see the various interpretations of the lantern at each station.
- Connections and partnerships with Seattle Central Community College will hopefully improve intersections in the area, including a pedestrian connection at Howell. *(We're working with the City and SCCC to link the three intersections with green connections to the park.)*

Discussion concluded and the Panel made the following recommendation:

Recommendation

The Panel thanks the consultants for a thorough presentation, including drawings of various potential future transit-oriented development scenarios, noting that these are helpful in envisioning how station entrances may ultimately become a part of a larger development. The Panel recommends approval of the schematic designs as shown, with particular support for:

- *The treatment of the below-grade platform area with its stepped vaulted ceiling and asymmetrical layout that helps the passenger distinguish one end of the tunnel from another;*
- *The prominence of the lantern form for the stationhouse at Howell and Broadway; and*
- *Development of strong pedestrian connections along Howell Street east and west of Broadway.*

The Panel requests further development and refinement of the following issues as the design progresses:

- *A stronger, less tentative design of the ribbon of glass above the stairs, to match the strength of the exterior glass envelope;*
- *Side walls that reflect the same spirit of design shown in the stepped, vaulted ceiling of the tunnel platform area;*
- *Design guidelines for any future development over the station entrances, highlighting the need to maintain prominence of the "lanterns" and maintain open space for people to gather in;*
- *Rethinking the marquee for the north entrance, in favor of keeping the lantern design concept as pure and uncluttered as possible so as not to lose the distinguishing characteristics that identify it with Link (vs. inadvertently creating some confusion about whether the entrance is to public transit or a private commercial building);*
- *Flexibility to create some retail opportunity on the south side of the north entrance, as well as an open space/plaza area for people to gather in; and*
- *Ensuring that the void inside the lantern offers clear direction to pedestrians as they approach the entrance, and also once inside the entrance*

The Panel awaits additional information about the likely consequences of a potential rezone to 65' height limit and its impact on the north station entrance before rendering an opinion. If it can be demonstrated that the rezone is likely to stimulate/accommodate market demand for development that would be supportive of light rail, the Panel would support it and would, furthermore, request that the City and Sound Transit work aggressively to bring a developer into the process now while station design is still underway. If, however, redevelopment above the north station entrance is unlikely under current or proposed zoning, the Panel would instead recommend redesign of the station entrance to accommodate a small pedestrian plaza and gathering area, bringing the open space to the outside of the site (north side). In other words, without certainty of transit-oriented development above the entrance, the Panel believes the trade-offs including loss of open space and added infrastructure costs are too great.

LRRP Business

- Meeting notes from May 3rd and May 17th were approved as amended.
- Cheryl Sizov discussed the Martin Luther King Task Force and the fact that she is representing the LRRP. She is packaging up all the work which has been done so far by the Panel on MLK JR Way to forward to the new consultant. The LRRP action regarding MLK JR Way has been amended to support the Task Force along with the idea of adding a layperson to the group, as per LRRP's recommendation

at the last meeting. The letter from Pat Naumann was discussed and the train/bus conflict was further explored.

- U-District tree issues were discussed. The action item will reemphasize the support for preserving existing trees and vegetation at all stations, and at 15th and 45th street in particular.
- Since the stations at Royal Brougham and Lander will be coming in for permitting soon, Cheryl is developing design guidelines for these two stations first. The guidelines will be processed as a Director's Rule. The Rule will include specific guidelines for each station for use by DCLU staff during permit review. The public comment period and the process of adoption was discussed. The idea of public workshops was discussed and this will be further explored at the LRRP retreat.
- There was a reminder about the July 7th LRRP retreat.

The meeting adjourned at 6:10 pm.